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L'interface France–Iran 1907–1938: une diplomatie voilée, Mariam Habibi, edited by Henry Panhuys, preface by Pierre Milza, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004, ISBN 2-7475-6712-5, 408 pp.

This book is a revised version of Mariam Habibi's doctoral thesis, written at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris under the direction of Pierre Milza and defended in 2000, "La Perse, une suite d'occasions manquées: la carence d'une diplomatie ou son application, 1907–1938." In twelve well-balanced chapters organized into three parts, it sheds light on Franco-Persian relations during three decades that were very eventful both internationally and bilaterally. Habibi starts her narrative in 1907, for in that year French diplomacy managed to bring about the Anglo-Russian Agreement. This agreement mattered a great deal, because since the birth, in 1904, of the Anglo-French *Entente cordiale*, the principal concern France had in Iran was to keep an eye on Anglo-Russian relations and help push the two powers to solve their disagreements. Success came on 31 August 1907 in the form of the Anglo-Russian Agreement, which bore on Iran, Afghanistan and Tibet. In the Iran section of the agreement, Russia and Britain, while promising to respect the integrity and independence of the country, divided it into three zones: a northern one, under Russian influence, a southern one, under British influence, and a middle, neutral one, to which the two powers would have equal access.¹ Thus, faced with the "Triple Alliance" that had existed from 1882 between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, the French Republic served as the midwife for the "Triple Entente" following the Anglo-Russian partition of the afore-noted Asian regions. Two powerful coalitions were formed, splitting pre-World War I Europe into two antagonistic blocs, each with its friends and protected domains attached. An arms race developed between the two camps, which were content with an "armed peace" installed in Europe.²

In the first part of her book, Habibi outlines the European political scene at the start of the twentieth century, and demonstrates with clarity that French behavior in Iran differed from that of Britain and Russia. The latter were actively involved in the events of Iran's constitutional movement, even sometimes gave advice and/or directly abetted this or that force. In contrast, the former acted with reserve, it was a passive observer of the constitutional movement in order not to endanger the

1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement. While the ideas of the French Revolution had inspired many Iranian constitutionalists and while of these, more than one believed France could fill the rank of a third power in Iran, balancing Russia against Britain, France was at the time much more concerned about, and busy in, Morocco and Indochina.

Habibi has relied on French archives including the "Archives diplomatiques," in Paris, the "Service historique de l'armée de terre," the "Archives Nationales," as well as the "Archives de la Police," all of which she has probed well and studied in detail. Missing, though, are documents from archives in Britain and Russia, the two principal protagonists. If the latter may be less accessible, also for linguistic reasons, the former would undoubtedly have added value to this book.

Another regrettable lacuna in this first part of the book is the fact that in a chapter on "French cultural policy" vis-à-vis Iran (pp. 115-27), the author treats only French education, but omits to mention another considerable French interest in Iran at the time: its archaeological monopoly. This privilege, granted to France in 1895 by Naser al-Din Shah, became exclusive and perpetual during Mozaffar al-Din Shah's first visit to France in 1900. However, it was endangered by the Constitutional movement and the resultant surge in national pride, encouraged by German machinations. Constitutionalists accused the French archaeological delegation of having limited its excavations to Susa, where all finds belonged, by the letter of the convention of 1900 with Mozaffar al-Din Shah, to the French government. As a result, the French authorities encouraged Jacques de Morgan, the delegation's director, to launch excavations throughout Iran in order to protect the French archaeological monopoly. This approach was maintained until the outbreak of World War I—that is, even after de Morgan's resignation and the termination of the archaeological delegation in 1912.³

The second part of the book studies Franco-Iranian relations from the start of World War I in August 1914 until the fall of the Qajar dynasty in December 1925. The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 and its effect on Franco-Persian relations are intelligently analyzed as the core issue of the period treated in this part of the book. Habibi describes French bitterness about the 1919 agreement signed between Vosuq al-Dowla and Sir Percy Cox, and shows that France hoped, and tried, to replace Russia and/or Germany as a strong force in Iran following the war. Regrettable in this part of the book, and the book as a whole, is "the scarcity of Persian documents despite the existence and accessibility of numerous Iranian sources," as Yann Richard justly pointed out in a review of Habibi's book.⁴ In fact, how can one study and write about bilateral relations by relying on the archives of only one of the two countries involved? Applying this method makes writing a balanced and objective account more difficult.

Part Three, the most interesting section of the book, shows how liberty of expression and of the press in France created problems in the bilateral relations in the Reza Shah era (1925-41). Habibi's research into the French press of the period is methodical. She shows with clarity which elements

played an important role in cooling down Franco-Iranian relations, which ended in a rupture: the shah sent back to Paris French officers hired to help carry out military reforms.

It is well known that under Reza Shah, who relied on nationalist ideas to try abolish all Qajar concessions, the French archaeological monopoly was more than ever threatened. And indeed, finally, on 18 October 1927, after long bilateral negotiations, France gave up the monopoly it had enjoyed for the past thirty-two years. However, France kept the right to the Susiane excavations, while agreeing to share its finds with Iran. In exchange, Iran agreed to appoint for at least twenty years a French specialist, to be named by the French government, as Director General of Antiquities, including a library and museum to be built under his supervision—a role assumed from 1928 by architect and art historian André Godard.⁵ However, although the 1927 agreement opened a new page in Franco-Iranian relations (and in fact had negative consequences for those relations), it is not mentioned in Habibi's book, which is doubly surprising given the originality of her work, the novelty of her approach and quality of her analysis.

To conclude, despite the few, deficiencies noted above, Habibi's work is thorough, well documented, and well written. It is required reading for anybody interested in the complexities of France's Iran policy in the first half of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Siassi, *La Perse au contact de l'Occident*, 108; see also Afschar, *La politique européenne en Perse*.
2. Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de l'Europe contemporaine*, 253–4; Aldebert et al., *Histoire de l'Europe*, 295.
3. Nasiri-Moghaddam, *L'archéologie française en Perse et les antiquités nationales*, 169–95.
4. Richard, review of *L'interface France–Iran, 1907–1938*.
5. Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Archaeology and the Iranian National Museum."

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